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Testimony of Representative Susan Johnson  
Public Health Committee Public Hearing  
March 4, 2015

**Regarding:** HB 5896 An Act Establishing A Nutritional Advisory Council

Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee: Thank you so much for hearing HB 5896, An Act Establishing a Nutritional Advisory Council

In the United States, obesity has risen at an epidemic rate during the past 20 years. Nearly two-thirds of adults in the United States are overweight, and 31 percent are obese. Particularly disturbing is the dramatic increase in the prevalence of overweight or obese children and adolescents. Connecticut ranks 5th nationwide in overall obesity prevalence with 25.7% of children considered either overweight or obese. Due to the current rate of childhood obesity we now project roughly 412,641 cases of diabetes by 2030 within Connecticut alone.<sup>1</sup> HB 5986 bill will help schools play an important role in combating this serious long-term public health crisis.

Schools play a significant role in promoting life-long health and dietary habits. Eating a healthy diet and increasing physical activity reduces weight that is shown to reduce the risk for many diseases – including diabetes. In order for our children to make long-term healthy decisions, they should at least be provided the informational resources to empower their lifestyle choices from their schools. Lunchtime can serve to be an interactive learning experience for school children.

To begin the process of combating this crisis, there needs to be a guiding entity that can focus on developing a nutrition education program, make policy recommendations, and

submit reports on these matters. Establishing a nutrition education advisory council will create a healthy eating environment for our school children.

Schools can use a wide variety of marketing activities to promote healthier school meals and healthy living in general. Young people are more likely to choose nutritious products when they are presented with appealing, attractive packages that are appropriately priced. Even small improvements in student eating habits can have an important impact on their health. A study on school health policies and programs found that healthy marketing techniques including giving menus to students, placing posters or other materials promoting healthy eating habits in the cafeteria, and also providing articles about healthy living throughout the schools can contribute to the development of healthy eating habits.<sup>2</sup>

This proposed advisory council composed of health care professionals will provide leadership and guidance to overcome obstacles and promote healthy habits. Members will be able to provide a comprehensive program for addressing various public health issues and the council may submit corresponding reports to the Commissioner of Public Health and the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to public health.

The establishment of a nutrition education advisory council will enable school children to lead longer and healthier lives through a formalized nutritional program.

Thank you for your attention to my presentation.

<sup>1</sup> Trust for America's Health and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The State of Obesity 2014. Washington, D.C.: 2014. [<http://stateofobesity.org/files/stateofobesity2014.pdf>]

<sup>2</sup> Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; and U.S. Department of Education. FNS-374, Making It Happen! School Nutrition Success Stories. Alexandria, VA, January 2005. [<http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/making-it-happen-school-nutrition-success-stories>]